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**Group: YESPA**

**Show: Fiddler on the Roof**

**Venue: The Harlequin Theatre, Redhill**

**Date: 5th August 2021**

**Artistic Director: John Harries-Rees assisted by Keir Gilbert-Halladey**

**Musical Director: Jamie Cordell**

**Choreographer: Lindsay Swift**

**Fiddler on the Roof** – famous for its journey into Jewish traditions, it is an ideal vehicle for a talented youth group such as YESPA.

The Harlequin Theatre has a modern, welcoming foyer with an efficient bar and box office (although the latter may have struggled with the large numbers on opening night). There were plenty of Front of House staff to assist the patrons. The auditorium's grand design was packed...with barely an empty seat.

The programme was informative, well designed and well-priced. I recommend that YESPA enter it in the NODA Programme & Poster Competition. <https://www.noda.org.uk/programme-and-poster-competition>

Washed with gentle lighting, the open stage had an attractive, minimalist set, designed by Amelia Hulbert. It consisted of lattice-works of planks arranged to form the outline of the village. But the wandering stage-hand didn't really add to the effect. Tevye's cottage was a focal point of activity. Different artefacts and furniture indicated whether it was an inside or outside view. One little niggle was that the cottage position didn't meet the Stage Right side-masking, so that people were seen waiting and entering from behind. Scene changes were all smoothly carried out, with the stage crew dressed in costume. The minimalist approach continued throughout, but always illustrating where the action was taking place.

Lighting was used very effectively. Individuals and groups were well lit. I wasn't conscious of follow spots...perhaps that's as it should be? During Tevye's confrontations with his daughters, the change to red lighting was very abrupt and dramatic. Changing to amber light seemed more gentle and just as effective (Maybe I missed some symbolism here?). Stand-out moments were the pool of light on the Sabbath scene; and the silhouette of Tevye at the end.

Sound amplification was well done; and voices were generally crystal clear. Good sound effects, though I sniggered at the synchro of the Breaking of the Glass...sorry !

Costumes were well chosen and appropriate to the characters and the period. It was easy to distinguish between Russian and Jewish characters. Hair and make-up were good...apart from a couple of dodgy beards. Props were also spot-on; and were always handled correctly and smoothly.

Lindsay Swift must be congratulated on the quality of the dancing. Just navigating that huge cast about the stage was effort enough; but BOY did they look good ! Even the youngest were stamping out their steps with energy, passion and precision; and the set pieces, such as the Bottle Dance, were a delight.

Musical Director, Jamie Cordell, led a fine orchestra, particularly the woodwind and strings. The arrangements were delightful; they supported the singers and didn't drown them.

The singing was of a very high standard all the way through. *Tradition* was tightly performed: the singing and dancing were precise and excellent. *Matchmaker*, performed by the three sisters (Ruth Cheek, Hayley Turner & Frankie McCardell) was lovely. Hayley's singing was particularly good. *If I were a Rich Man* was a good rendition by Piers Spicer - natural and believable. The *Sabbath Prayer* was attractively arranged. The singing and movement were beautifully executed; and the final image was enchanting. *To Life* was great fun and much enlivened by Luca Crawford's endless solo note and his leading of the dance. *The Dream* was a fantastic entertainment...beautifully constructed and manoeuvred...and achingly funny. The wedding scene was charmingly presented; and *Sunrise, Sunset* was very moving. The *Do you Love Me ?* duet was extremely well harmonised by Tevye and Golde. Forced to leave their homes, the villager's final song, *Anatevka*, is a bitter-sweet hymn to their lost village.

All of the acting was smooth and naturalistic...everyone totally in the moment. Piers Spicer utterly inhabited the role of Tevye. Without any over-playing, he was the kindly patriarch who carries the show on his aching back. Cesca Ritchie as his wife, Golde, seemed a little nervous at first; but soon settled into a fine performance as the boss of the family. Their five daughters had attractive and individual characters

Zara Brotzel, Wesley Kent-Hargreaves Caitlin Maden and Ewan Murphy all did well in their parts. So did Aidan Caffyn, despite that beard. What a powerful actress is Delilah Skyrme. Her Mendel was crisp & assertive and dominated her scenes. The young Fiddler did a good job and I didn't envy him his elevated position. But he must keep still for the final pose with Tevye.

Artistic Director, John Harries-Rees, (assisted by Keir Gilbert-Halladey) has a mountain of experience; and it showed in his handling of this complex musical. He brought out the joys and heartache of the daily village life, without shying from the darker theme of the Russian authority's oppression of the Jews. And he had very fine cast and crew to support him.

The whole evening had a real buzz to it. Everyone was out to enjoy themselves and the performance certainly delivered that enjoyment.

Thank you so much for inviting us to your excellent show.

Graham Botterill